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Bard

That is us here
with a strange light landing
pitch black 7:30 in the morning at Schiphol
noon now on the Herengracht
and gulls and coots and mallards
ply the crossroading canals.
And different gulls flit by big windows.

23 November 1993, Amsterdam

Being in the world is mostly waiting.
There is an orchestra of such examples
pleading with the conductor:
Slow down and hear the music,

signor. Life is rife,
the chemical is catching.

Be a superior person, a
«Great Man» says the Sage
counting the persimmons on the market stall.

23 November 1993, Amsterdam

Curtains on canals.
The books are different
from a hundred years ago
but there are books

everywhere. Antiquariat
or sometimes spelt -kw-
the books
are different, a book
is not a text. One window
stuffed with Lyotard in four
languages, tells commodity,

a book is a commodity,
is silver, an épergne,
a leathery avocado, a bicycle,
books and bicycles, a book
is a sidewalk with an iron railing,
a paling, a ladder, a book
is a window full of medals,
a little dog that trots through your head.

24 November 1993
Amsterdam

THE LONG POEM

I thought I would write a lot in Amsterdam, a long poem I thought it would be. Could still be, something pale it should be, beautifully boned like Dutch people, solemn, Erasmian, with canals.

Water is quick here. Everybody bikes. Every discipline is arcane. Beneath the floors of the old book stores, the Blue Cellars begin, under the frequent tattered beds of women on display in the windows round the Old Church, the caverns of remorse stretch out to the salt beneath the Channel, water-stairs of forgiveness, couloirs of vain hope.

Cities bed in cities. The past sinks in until it reaches and releases the present, where we live. Where the coot (I think it's called a waterkip) in its Puritan clothes paddles with difficulty (not smoothly like a duck) on the Beulingsluis, laboring shyly up the canal in morning shade.

24 November 1993
Amsterdam

THANKSGIVING DAY IN AMSTERDAM

Saying thanks a voice
to nowhere did I come so churchless
as we go, to whom be thank you wise
if not to every? To me all mitt and mine.
A wondering of the bad old time
they left some heritage: a wake in the ocean,
a word carved into the wind. Or two,
and Soerabaja Johnny. So there is ground
orchestra of gulls with black eyebrows not our kind,
bold awkward coots, brants, gallinules, the hundred
guilder note shows two kinds of snipe. The royalty
of air, a duck in love, a penguin surprised.
Nightshop, footsteps in the fog. Streets of air?
Ventriloquist, you flee our lust, you scape
to occupy ungulped pellucid dawns upon
eternal tendencies, *zaken doen*, to do business,
the whole of life just a street between canals.
Horloge, beehive, tumble-tressed portugaises
bringing coffee — sans espoir, vivre, mais
avec un bout — ça suffit, et sans peur —
and the shanachies of elder islands recoil
here on the holy mainland absolute,
this is Eurasia. Science spoken
religion mute — no wonder the colonies came back
and Soerabaja eyes are everywhere.
Tell the told anew,
daughter of a terrace and a rose,
almond flavored, paved with sunlight
straight down the Herengracht the gulls stoop
to guess our difference. What is water waits.

25 November 1993, Amsterdam

In mist the kind of
sun you don't see
a rapt attention
to the particulars of everyday
life — let that be craft enough,

the daily art.

And so we walk out through northern mist
to find Van Gogh, a sun
always hidden in the germ of wheat,
a gaunt stone chapel hidden in a moment's prayer,
the wall all lichenous and grim
on the shade side where the roads fork
under the hillside of La Borne.

26 November 1993
Amsterdam

Being sure and being loud and being, these three—

a wire-mill down in the valley
and the forest — of which the name
is a shadow on a map, a racial memory
of a place with trees and bare men dying

and then it's ordinary morning.
Three times seven equals twenty-one again
and that next pure number upwards (up?)
is still waiting, coiled
around the outside of the world. We pray
for the welfare of the day.

27 November 1993
Osnabrück

LAST WORDS IN GERMANY

Snow beside tracks.
Frozen stream
half Holland.
On water ice
on ice snow,
the curious habits of hydrogen
tease us with their
(every moment pure)
perfection.
Never wice or snater.
Always itself complete
among our ruins.
Complete in every form.
Is form. The form
of water
the chemical of love.
Last night late TV
a lady cut her shirt apart
then bare she licked her finger.
What did this ion-play
(not the *Ion*, play of Euripides)
of fingertip in lip-
sticked mouth
taste like in mine?
What is the taste
of something seen?
Smell of an image.
Water. Ice.
Snow. Sleet.
Better even than we
(on snow the) crows
communicate.

28 November 1993, Lower Saxony

Sheep watch golf.
Sunday and
most of the snow has melted from the green.
What a strange
religion they must think.

28 November 1993
Holland

EN FACE

Across from every page
is one you've never read

the counterpart, the brother page,
Orestes missing from his anxious sister,
forever dangerous with maybe coming home.

28 November 1993
Holland

As through a line of trees
close up, trees across a field
we pass in this long train from Berlin
we see from far away, across a vaster greener field
another line of trees a mile or two beyond the first

small trees indeed and grey and vague and lost
against the huger trees of close —thread in a carpet
lost in the weaving— and
beyond those vague dimmering trees
another scale of seeing rises of falls.

28 November 1993
Holland

Singing with church bells
in Amsterdam
a tone below
and just before the beat—
to sing “the changes”

where the canal beside us
(the *gracht*, here Singelgracht)
bounces tone back
as coots (bobbing) and
gulls taking off,

a rising tone.

28 November 1993
Amsterdam

INCIDENT ON THE CANAL

We come to taste an island air
from there to here, *Zeitkunft*
(time-to-come but not to come,
not yet, noble suitor,
stumbling from your stalag,
all the prisons of the heart you
all at once break
free from and a gull

falls! (free fall?) to the thin
ice lamina on canal and
past the old pale Mercedes drops
a white nugget of sky food

lies on the ice, others come and one
(the same or not the same of them, who'd guess
the number of a gull?) picks
it up and goes,
a swoop of him away, come and go.

Come and go. Half-swamped dories.
Coats of arms hard to read up on the step-gables
past the hoisting beam sticks out of every house.

29 November 1993
Amsterdam

A GLIMPSE OF IRELAND

Seeing Great Blasket Island down there
“the next parish to America”
the last of Ireland and of course
you want to go there, the beautiful
soft small country
where no one dreams.

The green. The remarkable comfort
of being nowhere.
Not down there
where louts with drums and fiddles
clear the island’s throat,

my ancestors.
Over my émince de bœuf I balk,
I will not go. All my reasons
trot out like nervous dogs
yipping round the sheepfold of my head.

What’s the point of going
there? And you
with the clarity of wish:
Because I’d like to, it is pretty there.

*Lustless, to see the quick.
Quickless, to be there.
Thereless, to be here
Everywhere you go—*

I think that but say nothing,
nothing but yes, as if
a yes could mean all that, a word,
a word’s a thing meant to confuse an eye by ear—
my tongue in your ear.

29 November 1993, in flight

This bread I eat
bought five days ago in Germany
is good now, full of seeds and grains and if
I plant a piece of it
next spring our garden would be full of
flax, rye, oats and wheat and you
would be my flaxen-haired in sun
all that music tumbling out of a loaf of bread.

30 November 1993

FOR HERACLITUS

The usual is always waiting to unhappen.
The corner you turn turns round the world

turns the world round and you (suddenly)
are jungle. The thing you know

so well wants you to forget it. Needs you
for that. To be unknown!

Godliness of that ship —or of that ocean—
or hydrogen before the bitter bonding

that is the boundary of where we are.
Because the usual is only (always) water.

30 November 1993